

Louise Cordina at one of her family company's chicken farms in Arcadia. Picture: Rohan Kelly

# ONE PLUCKY BOSS-LADY

## Next gen poultry player keeping Cordina top of the pecking order



One-year-old Louise Cordina (left) and sister Rachael grew up next to the family chicken factory that Louise (below) now runs.

### JENNIFER SEXTON

LOUISE Cordina began shadowing her dad at the family's factory in Sydney's West the moment she was big enough to walk.

"As a little girl people would say to me 'What do you want to be when you grow up'. I was always going to be daddy. It was just something that I really had a passion for, from the very beginning," she says.

Dad is John Cordina and the factory was the chicken processing plant his grandfather began after World War II. Louise grew up in a modest little fibro house next door to the factory in Girraween.



Some of her earliest childhood memories are at the factory, doing little "jobs" like counting paperclips. Back then, says the 39-year-old, there was a small slotted glass window where employees would go every week to collect their yellow pay envelope.

"The ladies from the office tell stories of a little hand arriving over the bench once a week saying 'pay please'. They couldn't actually see me over the bench," Cordina says.

Cordina's passion for the business has endured and today means the workaholic who thrives on as little as four hours' sleep a night is presiding over a food conglomerate that turns over \$400 million a year and employs 820 people.

It's Sydney's longest-running chicken processing business and supplies fresh chicken to Coles, Harris Farm, Costco, IGA and Hello Fresh, as well as popular food outlets Oporto, Nados, Grill'd and Mad Mex.

Louise Cordina has thrown on its head the old adage that the first generation makes the money, the second generation spends it and the

third generation blows it. This fourth generation Cordina has modernised and radically changed the business which began after her great-grandfather Rosario Cordina emigrated from Malta and got a little plot of land in Botany, a tin shed and a few pigs.

When Rosario's son Joe — Cordina's grandfather — was around 13, he spied an opportunity that made the business what it is today.

His job was to pick up food scraps from restaurants for the pigs, but started buying chickens from the markets and selling chicken meat to chefs.

Now, Cordina says, "most Aussies would be eating the

Cordina brand every week — whether that be in a meal on an airline or at their favourite fast food outlet or in a product they've picked up at a retailer."

Several years ago she convinced her conservative family to invest tens of millions of dollars on a new manufacturing and processing plant on the Central Coast, expanding into making everything from "pulled pork to tofu and organic chicken nuggets".

The food development team is constantly coming up with "new fandangled" products which they bring to Cordina for tasting.

"The most common question I get asked is, do I eat a lot of chicken. I do, a lot," she says, adding there are many misconceptions about chicken.

"I think most consumers would be shocked to know that no meat chickens in Australia are in cages and no meat chickens in Australia are given hormones."

